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From Universals to Topics: The Realism of Rudolph Agricola, with an Edition of his Reply to a Critic

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Abstract

Rudolph Agricola's *De inventione dialectica* has rightly been regarded as the most original and influential textbook on argumentation, reading, writing, and communication in the Renaissance. At the heart of his treatment are the topics (*loci*), such as definition, genus, species, place, whole, parts, similars, and so on. While their function in Agricola's system is argumentative and rhetorical, the roots of the topics are metaphysical, as Agricola himself explicitly acknowledges. It has led scholars to characterize Agricola as a realist or even an extreme realist. This article studies two little treatises on universals by Agricola that throw further light on his realism. It is suggested that they could be viewed as an early step in his long-term project of revising and re-organizing the systems of topics as he encountered them in Aristotle, Cicero, and Boethius. The article offers a close analysis of the treatises, suggesting that Agricola's realism owes a (general) debt to the school of the Scotists. In both earlier and later work Agricola emphasizes the common aspects of things that enable us to categorize and talk about things without denying their fundamental unicity and individuality. An edition of Agricola's second treatise on universals—a reply to a critic—is added.

Keywords

universals, topics, humanism, dialectic, Agricola, Duns Scotus

1. Agricola: *De inventione dialectica* and the treatise on universals

One of the most influential works in the history of Renaissance thinking on language and argumentation is Rudolph Agricola's *De inventione dialectica*, finished in 1479 but published in 1515 long after Agricola's death in 1485. In this work Agricola, as has been frequently and well explained by scholars, tries to bring together rhetoric and dialectic into one system of topical invention,

showing how we can find arguments by using a set of places or topics (*loci*) such as definition, genus, species, place, time, similars, opposites, and so forth. In Agricola's hands logic thus becomes a much more practical tool than it was before, a tool that aids a student not only in organizing any type of discourse but also in analyzing a text in terms of its underlying questions and argumentative structure. The *De inventione dialectica* contains much more than an innovative treatment of the topics, however; it explores a whole range of issues concerning what we would now call communication and information. It exercised considerable influence on major humanists such as Vives, Erasmus, Latomus, Melanchthon, Ramus, and Nizolio, and its account of the topics was required reading for almost any sixteenth-century author of dialectic books. Scholars have even spoken of "a revolutionary impact" as it inaugurated a new tradition of textbooks in rhetoric and dialectic.¹

Agricola locates his work firmly in the tradition of the arts of rhetoric and dialectics, and his principal sources are Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, and Boethius. His aims are instructional and practical rather than metaphysical. As Peter Mack has pointed out: "*De inventione dialectica* does not address the problems in metaphysics raised by the earlier books of Aristotle's *Organon*. Agricola assumes that Aristotle's metaphysical system is workable, and he elaborates it a little (in a strongly realist direction) in order to explain how the topics work."² Likewise Walter J. Ong said: "Agricola fails to commit himself outright to any significant theoretical stands, either literary or philosophical."³ And indeed in the *De inventione dialectica* we do not find direct discussions of the Aristotelian categories, the predicables, or universals, nor is Agricola interested in philosophical theories about meaning and signification. But even if the *De inventione dialectica* does not address metaphysical issues in any explicit way, it is not difficult to realize that Agricola's account of the topics and of

¹ The most extensive discussion of *De inventione dialectica* and its diffusion and influence is Peter Mack, *Renaissance Argument. Valla and Agricola in the Traditions of Rhetoric and Dialectic* (Leiden, 1993). For a concise treatment see also his *A History of Renaissance Rhetoric 1380-1620* (Oxford, 2011), 56-75. See also M. Cogan, 'Rodolphus Agricola and the Semantic Revolutions of the History of Invention', *Rhetorica* 2 (1984), 163-194 on the topical systems of Cicero, Boethius and Agricola, and their differences ("revolutionary impact," 165). Older accounts include W. J. Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue. From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), 92-130 (but outdated in some respects) and C. Vasoli, *La dialettica e la retorica dell'Umanesimo* (Milan, 1968), 147-182.

² Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 255.

³ Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, 100; cf. 98: "Agricola's dialectic makes no issue of being anti-Aristotelian as Ramus' was to do."

language and argumentation in general is based on philosophical assumptions that concern the relationship between the world, language, and thought. Can the system of the topics, for instance, be considered as a description of reality, that is, as the way in which reality is structured, or are the topics merely an aid of human invention to point to, describe, talk and argue about things? Do the topics perhaps guide our view of reality or perhaps the way we carve up reality? More generally, do our terminological distinctions reflect ontological distinctions? Agricola does not pose such questions, but some of his statements presuppose a certain view of reality that Mack has characterized as “realist” or even “extreme realist in metaphysics,”⁴ pointing also to a little treatise on universals, written by Agricola at an earlier stage of his life, that seems to confirm this interpretation. This treatise, entitled *Singulares aliquot de universalibus* (“some questions about universals”), was incorporated in the edition of the *De inventione dialectica* by its sixteenth-century editor and commentator, Alardus of Amsterdam, who also tells us that Agricola had once planned to write a book on universals.⁵ Because the *De inventione dialectica* has clearly practical and didactic aims and does not address such metaphysical issues, this little treatise may tell us in a more direct way something about Agricola’s philosophical position and possibly about the metaphysical assumptions underlying his great work.

Indeed, Eckhard Kessler thinks that this treatise must be regarded as the foundation or basis (“Grundlage”) of the *De inventione dialectica*. In a brief discussion he suggests that the treatise is not incompatible with nominalism, claiming for instance that Agricola’s definition of the universal “is analogous to Ockham’s definition of the universal sign.”⁶ Markus Friedrich has also explored the possible presence of nominalist strands in Agricola’s treatise on universals, and even though he concludes that Agricola cannot be called an Ockhamist, he still leaves open the possibility of some affinities at a general level.⁷ According

⁴ Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 136 n. 20; cf. p. 255. As we shall see, Agricola cannot be called “an extreme realist.”

⁵ Agricola, *De inventione dialectica*, with Alardus’s commentary (Cologne, 1539), 36. The questions about universals are on pp. 37-41 of this edition. The format does not follow a typically scholastic *quaestio*.

⁶ E. Kessler, ‘Die verborgene Gegenwart Ockhams in der Sprachphilosophie der Renaissance’, in *Die Gegenwart Ockhams*, eds. W. Vossenkuhl and R. Schönberger (Weinheim, 1990), 147-164, on 151: “in Analogie zu Ockhams Definition des universalen Zeichens.”

⁷ M. Friedrich, “‘War Rudolf Agricola Nominalist?’ Zur Bedeutung der Philosophie Ockhams für den Sprachhumanismus”, in *Res et Verba in der Renaissance*, eds. E. Kessler and I. Maclean (Wiesbaden, 2002), 369-388.

to Henk Braakhuis, however, Agricola's treatise can be interpreted only as "clearly realistic," but the "clartés" of this interpretation are, in the words of another scholar, "un peu trop aveuglantes."⁸ A closer examination of this treatise is therefore expedient for at least the following reasons. First, scholarly disagreement shows that Agricola's realism is not something completely straightforward and unambiguous. Was Agricola indeed a realist, and if so what kind of realist? Second, there is another text by Agricola on universals, written as a response to a certain Phaselus, who had criticized Agricola's treatise on universals.⁹ This response has never been studied or edited, and though—as we will see—Agricola basically repeats his original position, it is useful to take this response into account as well. I will therefore provide an edition of this text in the appendix to this article. Third, a closer examination of the treatise—in combination with Agricola's response to Phaselus—may help us determine the nature of Agricola's metaphysical position in the *De inventione dialectica*. What exactly is the relationship between this early debate on universals and Agricola's mature work on the topics and argumentation? Is it indeed "the basis" (*Grundlage*) of the *De inventione dialectica*, or is the link much more tenuous than that? Can we see echoes of his treatment of universals in his later discussion of the topics, different though they are?

Another but much broader question would be that of Agricola's place in the development of Renaissance humanism, characterized (among other things) by the tendency to move away from theory and speculation toward a more practical, pragmatic approach in learning and teaching. In some humanists—we can think of Lorenzo Valla, Pierre Ramus and Mario Nizolio—this took the form of a strongly anti-scholastic and anti-Aristotelian attitude, in others—here we may mention J. L. Vives and Philipp Melanchthon—it took the form of a more moderate criticism of scholastic learning. The first group was overtly

⁸ H. A. G. Braakhuis, 'Agricola's View on Universals', in *Rodolphus Agricola Phrisius, 1444–1485*, ed. F. Akkerman and A. J. Vanderjagt (Leiden, 1988), 239–247; Pierre Lardet's review of this volume in *Rhetorica* 8 (1990), 280. Also, Kees Meerhoff, 'Ramus en tijdgenoten', *Lampas* 34 (2001), 352, does not seem very sure whether Agricola can be called a realist. But Agricola's contemporary Wessel Gansfort thought him to be a realist; see H. A. G. Braakhuis, 'Wessel Gansfort between Albertism and Nominalism', in *Wessel Gansfort (1419–1489) and Northern Humanism*, ed. F. Akkerman et al. (Leiden, 1993), 35.

⁹ It was noticed by Mack; see Braakhuis 'Agricola's View on Universals', 240 n. 4, and the appendix to *Rodolphus Agricola Phrisius*, 318 nos. 2 and 3. It is also mentioned by J. Worstbrock in his review of Agricola's *Letters*, ed. A. van der Laan and F. Akkerman, in *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 125 (2006), 475, and Worstbrock thinks it should have been incorporated in this edition of the letters.

anti-metaphysical (which is not to say that their own critique or their own alternative views did not derive from metaphysical assumptions), rejecting most of the conceptual armory of the scholastics. Valla aimed at reducing the categories to three (substance, quality, action), the six transcendentals to just one (*res*, thing), and criticized the traditional account of the predicables and important concepts such as form/matter, final causes, and privation. Following Valla, Nizolio likewise defended a horizontal ontology in which concrete things, grouped in classes by a creative act of the human mind, take center stage. Rejecting any kind of reification or hypostatization, he tried to do away with universals and essences. Nizolio explicitly aligned himself with the nominalists (*nominales*), and Valla too—though this is controversial—has often been regarded as a nominalist of some sort, although the only time he mentions Ockham he dismisses him as a representative of the perfidious lot that the scholastic logicians are for him. Now Agricola is often mentioned in one breath with Valla; he was certainly an important source for Nizolio and for less radical critics of scholastic thought such as Vives and Melanchthon.¹⁰ Yet he was much less anti-Aristotelian and, arguably, less anti-metaphysical than Valla and Nizolio. Not only did he examine the question of universals in a separate treatise, using (as we will see) some scholastic terminology that Valla and Nizolio would have abhorred, he also praised Aristotle frequently (though found his style obscure and difficult to follow) and held Duns Scotus in high esteem.¹¹ So what is his position in the humanist critique of essences and universals such as we find in Valla and Nizolio? A full answer to this question is beyond the limits that I have imposed on myself in this article, but I will briefly take up this question in the conclusion.

¹⁰ On Valla see Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 22-116 and L. Nauta, *In Defense of Common Sense. Lorenzo Valla's Humanist Critique of Scholastic Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009). On Agricola as a source for Vives, Melanchthon and Ramus see Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 303-355, and 244-250 (comparison between Agricola and Valla), K. Meerhoff, 'Melanchthon, lecteur d'Agricola: rhétorique et analyse textuelle', *Réforme—Humanisme—Renaissance* no. 30, 16 (1990), 5-22, and idem, 'Agricola et Ramus: dialectique et rhétorique', in *Rodolphus Agricola Phrisius*, 270-280. On Nizolio see L. Nauta, 'Anti-Essentialism and the Rhetoricization of Knowledge: Mario Nizolio's Humanist Attack on Universals', *Renaissance Quarterly* 65 (2012), 31-66.

¹¹ Duns Scotus is mentioned twice in the *De inventione dialectica*, ed. Alardus, 155 (*Scotus omnium, qui philosophiam tractaverunt, disputator multorum consensu acerrimus*) and 306. In this article all references to the treatise on universals as well as to the *De inventione dialectica* are to Alardus's edition. I will use the abbreviations *De univ.* and *DID*, but it should be borne in mind that the former is only a small addition to the latter.

2. Agricola's first treatise on universals

As mentioned, the treatise on universals, entitled *Singulares aliquot de universalibus quaestiones*, was not published during Agricola's lifetime, but was incorporated in the text of the *De inventione dialectica* by its sixteenth-century editor, Alardus of Amsterdam. No manuscript copy has survived. Unlike Agricola's response to Phaselus, this treatise does not feature in the famous collection of Agricola's works and letters, compiled posthumously by his friend Johannes of Plieningen and written in the hand of Johannes Pfeuzer in the 1490s. Alardus probably saw the manuscript in the collection of Pompeius Occo, the nephew of Agricola's friend Adolph Occo, to whom Agricola had sent the first fair copy of the *De inventione dialectica* and to whom he had left his papers.¹² It was only a rough draft and highly corrupt, Alardus writes, and he had to emend and edit it with the aid of J. L. Vives and other friends, before he could print it as a kind of appendix to chapter 6 of the *De inventione dialectica* on genus and species.¹³ Neither Alardus nor Agricola himself give us any clue when and where Agricola had composed these *quaestiones*, but it is likely—given the subject and the style—that it dates back to his student days in Erfurt or Louvain, where Agricola had studied arts and law in an environment that was still dominated by scholastic thought, although early humanism (*Frühhumanismus*) began to play an increasingly prominent role here too.¹⁴ From his biographers we know that Agricola was interested in classical dialectics already as a student.

¹² It might be one of the minor works that Alardus had obtained through Haio Hermann, “who had married Pompeius Occo's daughter” (Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 262).

¹³ *De univ.*, 36: “Proinde non ab re fuerit hic referre censuram Rodolphi Agricolae de uniuersalibus, licet non in hoc conscriptam, ut ederetur [aederetur *ed.*] unquam. Vt enim qui parant statuam facere, prius rude quoddam simulacrum fingunt e trunco, postea dolant ac poliunt, ita cum Rodolphus Agricola librum aliquem de uniuersalibus instituisset conscribere, hanc futuri operis syluulam deliniauit (...). Iam uero quum Ioannes Vives Valentinus et Iacobus Volcardus Bergensis praeter philosophiae professionem undecunque doctissimi, non minimo nobis adiumento fuerint, ut hanc censuram plane deprauatam, imo mutilam utcunque restitueremus, illisque uiris acerrimi sane iudicii non indigna uisa sit, quae in apertum proferretur et huic loco inferciretur.”

¹⁴ Ibid.: “quamuis extempore, quamuis alieno stomacho scriptum.” Does Alardus suggest that it was perhaps too metaphysical for Agricola's own taste? On *Frühhumanismus* in Erfurt see G. Bauch, *Die Universität Erfurt im Zeitalter des Frühhumanismus* (Breslau, 1904), mentioning Agricola on 40–41; G.-R. Tewes, *Die Bursen der Kölner Artisten-Fakultät bis zur Mitte des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Cologne, 1993), esp. 665–805 on “Bursen-Humanismus und Bursen-Scholastik in Köln,” for Louvain hardly any good studies exist on teaching in the first part of the sixteenth century; see E. Lamberts and J. Roegiers, *Leuven University 1425–1985* (Leuven, 1990), 69.

The treatise starts with “two questions that are frequently posed.”¹⁵ “(1) whether universals are something existing outside the soul, that is, outside the thinking and *figmentum* of our mind. And then, if this is the case, (2) whether they are to be distinguished from singulars.” The first question is answered in the affirmative some paragraphs later, but Agricola does not work toward his answer in a very orderly way. The second question is answered in the affirmative only in the last paragraph of the treatise. Agricola does not mention any source, though it is difficult not to think of the three famous questions with which Porphyry started his *Isagoge*:¹⁶ (1) Do universals exist in themselves or in mere concepts alone? (2) If they do exist, are they corporeal or incorporeal? (3) If incorporeal, do they exist apart or in sensible objects and in connection with them?¹⁷ Though Agricola does not mention the rival schools of *reales* and *nominales*—he alludes only to the school of the Scotists much later—the way in which he formulates his questions suggests that for him these are the two main positions.

From his own definition of the universal, which he gives at the beginning, Agricola seems to favor a clearly realist position: “a universal is what exists as an essential unity and is common to many things; e.g., animal is one genus, what is in a horse, an ass, a cow and a man.” (37) The formulation bespeaks a realist stance: universals *are in* things; he does not say, as he does later in the *De inventione dialectica*: “are *predicated* of many;” we shall come back to this point. The crucial problem of course is how something can be one and yet exist in many things. Agricola therefore distinguishes between different meanings of “one.” We can speak of a unity of collection (a pile of stones), a unity of conjunction (body and soul), a unity by denial (“not many,” as in “every being has one proper *passio*,” or “everything that is, is one”), or a unity by likeness, community or nature (*assimilatione uel communitate uel ratione*): white things having the “same, one color in common.” This last sense is of course what is at stake here: things are like each other or similar (*similia*) to each other if they have the same form or nature or species; or, as Agricola puts it, “if their form or nature is of the same *ratio*.” (38) Hence, a universal is “a certain essential similitude in many things (*essentialis quaedam in multis similitudo*).” Agricola apparently does not distinguish between the essential nature, e.g. humanity in Plato, as something Plato possesses, independent of any other

¹⁵ *De univ.*, 37; references will be given in the main text.

¹⁶ Agricola knew Porphyry’s *Isagoge* well; see e.g. *DID*, 50 (on *proprium*).

¹⁷ Porphyry, *Isagoge, translatio Boethii*, ed. L. Minio-Paluello, with B. Dodd (Bruges, 1966), 5; transl. E. W. Warren (Toronto, 1975), 27-28.

person or thing, and the likeness on account of which we say that Plato and Socrates belong to the same species. If all human beings were destroyed except for Plato, one might think that we could still speak of Plato's humanity, but in order to speak of *similitudo* more than one human being seems to be required.

This emphasis on the unity of a universal raises the question of how it can be distinguished from a singular thing (this horse, this man), which is also a unity, and perhaps even more so. Agricola therefore distinguishes between two different senses of "singular:"

- (i) singular in number (= one as opposed to many). Thus, Plato's humanity, taken by itself, is singular, i.e., it is one in number. (Agricola uses various terms: "*singularitas*," "*unitas naturalis*" and "*hoc esse*.") In this sense singular does not stand in opposition to universal. Each being (*ens*) has a unity or singularity (or *ratio*).
- (ii) singular can also refer to something that cannot be found anywhere else. Agricola speaks of "*singulare in causabilitate uel incommunicabilitate*," e.g. singular love or the sun's singular light, but also of Plato being a singular man because his substantial property (*proprietas substantialis*) makes him the individual he is, different from all other human beings.¹⁸ So Plato's humanity is singular in unity—in this sense universal does not stand in opposition to singular—but it is in no way "singular in incommunicability," for it is "*communicabile*," that is, it is also found in (all) other men.

So we can say that Plato and Socrates are different, yet the same—a point that Agricola develops by distinguishing between different senses of "different." Two things can be said to be different (*diversa*) when it is simply true to say that the one is not the other. When the one has a certain property by which it

¹⁸) "*Causabilitas*" can also be found in realist authors such as Wyclif and Raymond Lull; the latter often uses "*causabilitas*;" he was certainly known to Agricola, who comments on the Art of Lull in *DID*, 181. Though critical of his style he praises Lull's mind; Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 136 n. 20 has suggested that the programme of Lull to unify the arts might have been an inspiration for Agricola. "*Communicabilitas*" occurs frequently in Duns Scotus (also outside trinitarian contexts); it also occurs frequently in Johannes de Nova Domo, e.g. in his *Tractatus universalium* but not in the same sense as in Agricola, and in general Johannes's (Albertist) language is different from Agricola's. The same is true, as far as I can see, for Heymericus de Campo. For some texts see the discussion in Sophie Włodek, 'Albert le Grand et les Albertistes du XV^e siècle. Le problème des universaux', in *Albert der Grosse: Seine Zeit, sein Werk, seine Wirkung*, ed. A. Zimmermann (Berlin, 1981), 193–207.

is distinguished from the other, they are not only *diversa* but also *differentia*. And when the one exists on its own, apart and separate from the other (*seorsum per se*), we call them not only *diversa*, *differentia* but also *discreta*, e.g. two substances, Plato and Socrates.¹⁹

The upshot of the discussion so far is that—as Agricola now concludes—universals exist outside the soul. The universal in Socrates is similar to that of Plato, hence Socrates and Plato are like each other (*similes*) in that they are of the same species. Agricola thinks that the similarity between Plato and Socrates, which “everybody can observe,” is not something we make up ourselves but is a fact independent of our cognitive faculties.

That the ontological order of essences is independent of our thinking is a point that Agricola now starts developing, rather abruptly, by arguing that the concepts of the sciences and arts would be meaningless if they would not refer to a stable structure of universals in the world. The argument, which is not very clear, can perhaps be expressed as follows:

- (a) The sciences are clearly distinguished from each other.
- (b) They are distinguished from each other by their subjects (*res*), and these differences are independent of our thinking (*semota animi cogitatione aut mentis operatione*).

The physician, e.g., considers generable and corruptible things rather than the concepts (*conceptus*) of generable and corruptible things. These things are composed of form and matter, and matter is composed of elements, and it would be nonsense to think that such things were just the product of our thinking or imagination (*figmentum or opus animi nostri*). They are really out there.

- (c) But the sciences are about universals (*circa universalia*), and the same is true for law, philosophy and medicine and other arts and sciences; their precepts and commands are “universal and common” (*universalia et communia*).

¹⁹ *De univ.*, 38-39: “Hoc ergo singulare est quod arbitror opponi universali. Singularia ergo prioris modi satis est esse diversa. Secundi modi, nedum diuersa, sed et differentia esse oportet. Sane modi distinguendarum rerum tres uidentur esse. Quaecunque enim distinguuntur, aut diuersa sunt, id est, quando uerum est dicere, hoc non est illud. Aut differentia sunt, hoc est, quum non solum uerum est dicere, hoc non est illud, sed hoc habet certam proprietatem aut notionem adiunctam, qua ab illo discernitur. Tertius distinguendi modus est, quando discreta sunt quae distinguuntur, id est, quodque seorsum per se, ab alio diuersum subsistit. Sic duas substantias, Socratem et Platonem, distinguere dicimus, et non solum ita distinguuntur, sed et differunt etiam, et sunt diuersi.”

- (d) Hence, universals must be outside the mind if the subjects of arts and sciences are outside the mind.²⁰

It is not quite clear how to interpret this strange argument. Agricola says that sciences are about the things themselves rather than about the concepts and terms that refer to the things. In this debate between nominalists and their critics that was fought in late-medieval schools, Agricola clearly endorses a realist position. But his universals appear to be a broad category: it apparently includes not only general concepts but—by stretching the meaning of the term “universal”—also commands, precepts, general propositions and universal propositions (what we may now term scientific laws). The notion of “thing” seems a bit ambiguous as well. His example of the physician suggests that he thinks of concrete things (this stone, this planet), but is actually thinking of universals (the nature or essence of these things). Agricola seems to mix up the question of the place of universals (outside the mind?) and the question of the object of science (concepts or things?), but though these issues are related they are of course not the same. Agricola’s main aim in this section seems fairly clear, however: if there were no such common natures, the sciences and arts would be about nothing, indeed our thinking and language would be meaningless because they would lack a referent.

This last point is developed in the next, rather difficult section, though again the thrust of his argument is clear enough. If universals are only in the mind, they either refer to something outside the mind or not. If not, then we have no possibility of distinguishing a purely imaginative concept such as chimera from a concept such as man. If they do refer to something outside the mind, then this must be something either of the same character as the universal—in which case it must also be a universal concept—or it is of a different nature (*habitus*) in which case we are back at the same problem, viz. that we do not have a criterion to judge the reality of our concepts (man as opposed to chimera). If reality were not structured by common essences, there would be nothing to form concepts of; we would never be able to group things together—reality would consist of a wholly disparate collection of things. Again, we would

²⁰ *De univ.*, 40: “Semota animi cogitatione aut mentis operatione, sane artes omnes, omnia doctrinarum genera distinguuntur, perinde ut distincta sunt ea quae tractant, ea uero res (...). Quum autem omnes doctrinae aut scientiae sint circa uniuersalia, necesse est uniuersalia aliquid esse extra animam, si quae tradantur ab artibus, sunt extra animam aliquid. Praeterea decreta legum, philosophorum praecepta, iussa medicorum omnia, uniuersalia et communia sunt, ea ergo necesse aut ad nullos pertinere, si nihil commune est in rebus.” Cf. perhaps *DID*, 209: “communia...quae iam ueluti leges...”

be unable to distinguish a concept of chimera, made up of wholly disparate parts, and the concept of man, equally made up of disparate parts.²¹

Having answered his first question with which he started his treatise, viz. whether universals are something existing outside the mind, Agricola at last turns to his second question in the final paragraph, whether universals are to be distinguished from singulars. His answer is affirmative. A universal is not the same as a singular. Socrates and Plato are the same in being humans, but they are different in that each is a singular being having his own specific property added to the universal (*notio uel proprietas addita humanitati*), what the school of Duns Scotus (*Ioannis Scoti secta*) calls a “*differentia individualis*.” (Agricola does not use the word “*haecceitas*,” this-ness here.) Moreover, we can recognize a man coming our way without (yet) noticing that it is Plato. That the two are not the same is also clear from the fact that the universal is “*communicabile*,” that is common to many things, while a singular is not. The same position can be supported by “the testimonies of many great philosophers,” but Agricola rests the case here, since it was not his intention “to examine what others had said but rather to investigate what can be said most truly and most in conformity with the nature of things (*ad rerum naturam*).”

3. A Scotist background?

Though brief and simple, we can make several observations about this treatise. It is quite clear that Agricola favors a realist position, but it is much less clear what for him universals exactly are. His argument that our concepts, in order to make sense, must correspond to universals existing outside the mind, seems to leave him with two types of universals: the concept *man*, which we know

²¹) *De univ.*, 40: “Ad haec si sint uniuersalia tantum in anima, utrum dicemus aliquid eis extra animam in re respondere, aut nihil? Si nihil, non dicemus quicquam interesse inter conceptum Chymerae et hominis, quum perinde uterque sit inanis, et cui nihil in re solidi aut certi subdit de quo formetur. At si dicimus subesse aliquid in re, illud aut dicimus tale esse quale conceptum est, aut alterius habitudinis, si tale dicamus, quum sit uniuersale, conceptum erit et uniuersale. Si alterius habitudinis, nihil intererit rursus inter hominem et Chymeram (...) Quid enim refert utrum mens nostra ea quae prorsus differunt et in nullo conueniunt, in uno communi coniungat, quum inter se penitus discrepent, an partes Chymerae dissidentis et quae in unam formam cogi non possunt, in unius corporis formas coactas esse confingat? Quod si ergo inter Chymerae conceptum et hominis et reliquorumque uniuersalium multum interest, et quae a legibus, philosophis et medicis statuuntur in commune, complectuntur multa, et traduntur multis communiter faciunda, non solum de multis concipiuntur, et artes scientiaeque quae de rebus extra animam et de uniuersalibus idem differunt uniuersaliaque tractant.”

we possess, and the metaphysical universal *man* that exists in but is not identical with individual persons. But he also writes about the latter in terms of (substantial) properties—as if humanity is a real existing property of Socrates, and also in terms of likenesses or similitudes. In other words, Agricola does not distinguish clearly between the logical concept, which, as he admits himself, is of course a product of our thinking, and an ontological entity. Though his first question as well as the argument he develops by way of answer suggest that universals exist only outside the soul, this is not the case: universals also exist in our mind, but the fact that there is an obvious difference between purely fictive concepts such as chimera and concepts with a *fundamentum in re* such as horse and man proves for Agricola that there must be universals that constitute this *fundamentum in re* for our concepts. Yet he does not tell us what the relationship between the two is nor how we acquire our concepts. He seems simply to presuppose a kind of mind-world identity. Unlike, for instance, Aquinas who spoke of a formal identity between our concepts (the intelligible species) and the forms or universals in things, Agricola does not develop his argument in this direction; indeed, he does not present us with anything more than a rough sketch (*sylvula* in Alardus's words), hardly more than a realist's credo; after all, it was only a rough draft that he had left, as its editor Alardus of Amsterdam confirmed. Agricola thus calls the ontological universal, which is independent of our thinking (as he repeatedly says), rather than our mental concept, "an essential similitude."

Agricola is in good company, however. The classic account by Boethius suffers from the same ambiguity. Boethius's answer to Porphyry's dilemma whether universals really exist or are formed by the intellect alone is that it is not the one *or* the other but that we can have it both ways.²² Universals have a double existence: they exist both in particular things and as concepts in our mind. The mind abstracts cathood after observing many cats, noticing the similitude between them, and forming the concept of cathood. The concept would be null and void if there would be nothing in extramental reality that corresponded to that concept. But Boethius does not want to give up the Aristotelian principle that everything that exists is one in number. Hence, universals must be said to be particular as sensed in particular things—they might be identified with the "likenesses" between things—but universal as grasped in thought. In essence, this is more or less the position we also find in Agricola. But Agricola sounds like a true realist when he stresses the

²²) For a convenient text see P. V. Spade, *Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1994), 20–25.

independent existence of the ontological order of universals that exists wholly independent from our thinking, and also when his endorsement of the difference between the universal humanity and the *differentia individualis* that makes Plato the individual that he is implies that the universal is not an individual thing even though he has tried to show that it was a unity itself too.

But rather than Thomas or Boethius it is Duns Scotus that comes to mind, and indeed, as we have seen, Agricola links himself with the school of the Scotists.²³ In Scotus too, as Timothy Noone remarks, “the logical treatment of universals cannot be entirely disentangled from the metaphysical one, since Scotus’s interpretation of the properly logical treatment is intimately connected with his own ontology.”²⁴ Agricola’s treatise is too brief and too elementary to trace clear debts to Scotus or Scotist teaching, but the introduction of the notion of “individual difference” that somehow combines with the specific nature (e.g. man) to form a substantial unity is of course typically a Scotist one, though Scotus did not think the haecceity is a property or accident. According to Scotus, this individual difference, which each individual being has, is incommunicable in that it is something that cannot become part of something else; it cannot compose something other than the individual being that it individuates.²⁵ Agricola’s distinction between the several meanings of

²³ Scotus was allowed at Louvain by a decision of 1446, as mentioned by J. Papy, ‘The reception of Agricola’s *De inventione dialectica* in the teaching of logic at the Louvain faculty of arts in the early sixteenth century’, in *Northern Humanism in European Context, 1469-1625*, ed. F. Akkerman et al. (Leiden, 1999), 169, n. 12, while Ockham “was a stranger in Louvain and remained as such in the commentaries [on Aristotle’s *Organon*] of 1535” (170). Maarten Dorp, however, was able to praise Ockham in glowing terms in a treatise from 1512, as D. Verbeke suggests in a forthcoming article on Dorp.

²⁴ Timothy B. Noone, ‘Universals and Individuation’, in the *Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, ed. T. Williams (Cambridge, 2006), 100-128, on 105 also referring to C. Marmo, ‘Ontology and Semantics in the Logic of Duns Scotus’, in *On the Medieval Theory of Signs*, ed. U. Eco and C. Marmo (Philadelphia, 1989), 143-193. This is not to say that Scotus does not distinguish clearly between the universal as the object of the intellect and as it is outside the soul: “that which-is (*quod quid est*) is the *per se* object of the intellect, is considered *per se* as such by the metaphysician, and is expressed through a definition... Not only, however, is the nature indifferent to being in the intellect and in the particular (and thereby to universal being and particular, or singular, being), but also, when it first has being in the intellect, it does not have universality in its own right (...) And just as the object in its first presence and ‘universality’ in the intellect has truly intelligible being (*esse intelligibile*), so too in reality the nature has, according to its entity, true real being outside the soul...” (*Ord.* 2, d. 3, pars 1, q. 1, nn. 32-4, transl. Noone, 109)

²⁵ Cf. Jorge J. E. Garcia, ‘Individuality and the Individuating Entity in Scotus’s *Ordinatio*: An Ontological Characterization’, in *John Duns Scotus: Metaphysics and Ethics*, ed. L. Honnefelder

unity as well as the distinction between *diversa*, *differentia* and *discreta* may also have been inspired by Scotist teaching, though Scotus himself had distinguished between numerical unity and the unity of common nature, arguing that the latter is “less than numerical unity” (*minor unitas*), because it is indifferent to singularity.²⁶ Also, Scotus had argued that “the individual differences are primarily and simply diverse, although the individuals constituted by those differences are items sharing the same specific nature, just as the items in the different species share in the genus despite the fact that they are constituted in their respective species by differences that are primarily diverse.”²⁷ The community that universals have “apart from the intellect,” as Scotus emphasizes,²⁸ is also a point on which Agricola, in his own way, insists. In the case of Scotus this does not imply a full-bodied realism but rather, as Olivier Boulnois has argued,²⁹ a conceptualism of universals combined with a realism of community:

la même nature qui est dans la chose, et qui y existe de manière singulière, peut devenir universelle par sa relation à l’intellect, ce qui est une pure relation de raison, une relation du connu au connaissant. L’universalité est une pure relation: elle est dans l’intellect le rapport de l’intelligible aux choses,—relation évidemment dissymétrique, qui ne change rien du côté de la chose, à son intelligibilité propre, mais qui est constitutive, du côté de l’intellect, de *intentio* comme telle. Scot va jusqu’à dire que l’intellect est la cause efficiente de l’universel, tandis que la chose en est le sujet, la cause matérielle ou l’occasion. L’intellect donne l’être à l’universel, tandis que la chose lui communique un contenu. La chose est bien un substrat, un fondement pour l’universel, mais l’intellect lui donne son mode d’être, et lui permet d’exister indépendamment de la chose même. L’universel peut ne pas exister dans la chose (il peut être l’objet d’un acte de mémoire, d’anticipation, de construction intellectuelle), mais il ne peut pas ne pas être dans l’intellect.³⁰

The nature or essence, existing as singular in things, can become universal by its relationship with the intellect. It is the intellect that gives the nature its being, its universal character, its community, and it is even said to be the

et al. (Leiden, 1996), 246, citing Scotus, *Ord.* q.6 n. 189, Vatican Edition 7:484; Noone, ‘Universals and Individuation’, 100–128.

²⁶ Gracia, ‘Individuality and the Individuating Entity’, 235 citing *Ord.* II d. 3 p. 1 q. 6 n. 172, Vatican Edition 7:476.

²⁷ Noone, ‘Universals and Individuation’, 121; Gracia, ‘Individuality and the Individuating Entity’, 246–47.

²⁸ *Ord.* 2, d. 3, pars 1, q. 1, n. 42, cited by Noone, ‘Universals and Individuation’, 110.

²⁹ ‘Réelles intentions: nature commune et universaux selon Duns Scot’, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 1 (1992), 3–33, in particular 28–33 on the importance of community for Scotus’s doctrine of universals.

³⁰ ‘Réelles intentions’, 30.

efficient cause of the universal: the thing is the foundation, the substratum of the universal, but it is the intellect that gives it its mode of being and makes its existence, independent of the thing itself, possible. Boulnois thus concludes that it is wrong to call Scotus an extreme realist, as has traditionally been done; Scotus's position steers a middle course between conceptualism and realism. It is a form of moderate realism.

A critical reader of Scotus may still be justified in doubting whether Scotus always manages to stay clear of the Charybdis of robust realism and the Scylla of pure conceptualism. But for our purpose we need not further delve into the intricacies of Scotist metaphysics to detect a Scotist inspiration in Agricola's little treatise on universals, though it is probably true to say that he did not make a deliberate choice for one realist school (Scotism) above the other (e.g. Albertism).³¹ The source of inspiration may have been fairly general, limited as it seems to have been to terminology such as "*causabilitas*" and "*incommunicabilitas*" and the doctrine of the individual difference. Agricola does not mention, e.g., the formal distinction nor does he use the term "*haecceitas*," though he knew the term (his opponent used it, on which see below).³² But he seems to follow Scotist teaching in thinking that universals as common natures exist independent of the intellect but that "community" is something that arises only because the mind notices and judges things as similar in a particular respect. As Thomas Williams summarizes Scotus's position:

The common nature is common in that it is 'indifferent' to existing in any number of individuals. But it has extra-mental existence only *in* the particular things in which it exists, and in them it is always 'contracted' by the haecceity. So the common nature *humanity* exists in both Socrates and Plato, although in Socrates it is made individual by Socrates's *haecceitas* and in Plato by Plato's *haecceitas*. The humanity-of-Socrates is individual and non-repeatable, as is the humanity-of-Plato; yet humanity itself is common and repeatable, and it is ontologically prior to any particular exemplification of it.³³

This is not very different from Agricola's view, though we do not find him explicitly arguing for an ontological priority of the common nature to any particular exemplification.

³¹ Without exploring a possible Scotist background as I have tried to do here, Braakhuis is right, I think, in saying that Agricola does not make "a choice between the different schools of realistic thought, e.g. Albertism or Scotism" ('Agricola's View on Universals', 246), but see n. 18 above.

³² Phaselus to Agricola, f. 203v.

³³ *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/duns-scotus>.

This brings me to a final observation. The student of humanist rhetoric and dialectic who holds to the traditional view of humanism as the very opposite of scholasticism in method and terminology will be surprised to find Agricola singing the praises of such a quintessentially scholastic thinker as Scotus.³⁴ But of course there was much interaction between scholastics and humanists; several of the theologians who were teaching in the Bursae in Cologne, well known to Agricola, had humanist interests., e.g. the prominent German humanist and friend of Agricola, Rudolf von Langen—to mention just one example—was a good friend of the Albertists in Cologne at the *Bursa laurentiana*, and full of admiration of Albert the Great, and so were their rivals in the *Bursa montana* full of admiration of Thomas Aquinas.³⁵ Nor should it come as a surprise to see Agricola using scholastic terms such as “*causabilitas*” and “*incommunicabilitas*.” In a letter to Alexander Hegius from 1480 Agricola had confessed that, in opposition to Valla, “I myself could conceivably say *Socratitas* and *Platonitas* and *entitas*, although Valla would object,” and indeed he explicitly defends the term “*quiditas*” in the *De inventione dialectica* (though this is the only place where such a term occurs).³⁶ As we have just seen, the early Agricola was even bolder in using scholastic terminology, and we do not find him here appealing to the linguistic usage (*consuetudo*) of the great authors or our customary way of talking to control the meanings of terms.

4. The debate between Agricola and Phaselus

We do not know when Agricola wrote this treatise on universals, but a response to it, written by a certain and otherwise completely unknown “philosopher” Phaselus, points to a time when Agricola was still studying the arts in Erfurt and in Louvain, that is, before he went to Italy at the end of the 1460s to study law and especially the *bonae litterae*. Phaselus’s response, entitled *sententia Phaseli philosophi de universali singulari et uno ad Rodolphum scripta* in the manuscript, is written in a curious and often incomprehensible Latin that

³⁴) *DID*, 155 and 168. The second reference strongly suggests that Agricola had really studied Scotus himself: “Ioannes Scotus itaque solet persaepe, sicubi perplexior quaestio incidit, velut expositionis loco praepondere formam imaginandae rei.” See also n. 23 above.

³⁵) For Agricola’s letters to Von Langen, see nos. 3 and 14 in *Letters*, ed. A. van der Laan and F. Akkerman (Assen, 2002). See Tewes, *Die Bursen der Kölner Artisten-Fakultät*, 715-17.

³⁶) See the letter no. 21 in Agricola, *Letters*, 130-31, referring to Cicero’s use of “*Appietas*” and “*Lentulitas*.” On *quiditas* see *De inventione dialectica*, 238. Cf. A. Wesseling, ‘Agricola and Word Explanation’, in *Rodolphus Agricola Phrisius*, 230-31 (not referring to the treatises on universals). Nauta, *In Defense of Common Sense*, 79-81.

combines a scholastic and a (proto)humanistic Latin.³⁷ Agricola himself probably thought it incomprehensible too, limiting his discussion to Phaselus's argument on universals. His response shows something of the quiet and respectful way of disputing with an opponent that his biographer Gerardus Geldenhouwer ascribed to him.³⁸ Agricola cites and discusses Phaselus's argument on the latter's own terms, which makes his text rather difficult, also because his own Latin has not yet achieved the clarity of his later works and because the text, as noticed, came down in a corrupt draft. He basically repeats his original position, making use of his distinctions of different senses of "singular," "individual," "common," and the distinction between *diversa*, *differentia* and *discreta*. I will discuss its main points as this text has not been studied before.

Agricola begins his exposition by discussing the concept of "communicability" because "a universal is nothing else than one thing common to many things," or to translate literally: "one communicable to many" (*unum communicabile multis*). (Agricola seems to use "*commune*" and "*communicabile*" interchangeably.) After having distinguished several meanings of "something in common," Agricola states what a universal is: "a universal is nothing else than one thing whose likeness is found in many things" (*unum cuius similitudo reperitur in multis*). This does not mean one in number, however, but one in the sense that many things share the same quality, quantity, essence, species or genus. Such similar things can be called "*conformes*" or "*conformia*." On this point he and Phaselus seem to agree, he says, but they do not agree on the ontological difference between an individual, species and genus. Introducing a horse called Rhebus, he says: "I distinguish this nature of animal from the nature of horse in the horse and the nature of the horse from the nature of Rhebus in Rhebus (...) I say that the being by which Rhebus is called animal is different from that by which it is called a horse and different again from which it is called Rhebus."³⁹ This is the point that Phaselus denies, and Agricola starts

³⁷ I made a transcript but have refrained from adding it to Agricola's reply in the appendix.

³⁸ Geldenhouwer, 'Vita Agricolae', in J. Fichardus, *Virorum qui superiori nostroque seculo eruditione et doctrina illustres atque memorabiles fuerunt vitae* (Frankfurt, 1536), f. 84. Agricola is also reported to have said that he regretted to have spent seven full years on this cavilling and useless art of the scholastics; 'Vitae Agricolae', in J. B. Kan, 'Wesseli Groningensis, Rodolphi Agricolae, Erasmi Roterodami Vitae...', *Erasmiani Gymnasii programma Litterarium* (Rotterdam, 1894), 7.

³⁹ Agricola to Phaselus, f. 206r: "Sed hanc animalis naturam ab equi natura in equo et equi naturam a Rhebi <natura> in Rhebo distingui, id prorsus uidetur, in quo nobis non conuenit, hoc est: ego aliud esse a quo Rhebus animal a quo equus a quo Rhebus uocetur dico, id tu negas;" see appendix.

to review Phaselus's argument in some detail, quoting sentences from the latter's text. Phaselus's main argument seems to be that essences can never be common: the humanity of Socrates is something individual and singular, and it does not need an additional, extrinsic quality (such as an individual quality) in order to be such an individual (see below). Agricola's aim is to show that while such a humanity indeed is an individual thing in a particular sense of the term, it is not sufficient to make, e.g., Socrates the individual he is, different from Plato.

He first quotes an argument from Phaselus to the effect that likeness (in the sense of Socrates is like/similar to Plato) is a type of relation, or a *relatiua oppositio*. Aristotle had indeed said that relatives (such as double and half, and knowledge and the knowable) are one out of four kinds of opposition.⁴⁰ Phaselus therefore thinks that Agricola's own definition of universal as a similitude implies that, e.g., the humanity of Socrates is different from that of Plato, even if there is no individual *differentia* added to it. This might also be the reason why Phaselus had ironically started his treatise "to thank" Agricola for supporting his position *against* all realists and Scotists.⁴¹ Obviously, Agricola has to qualify this. He replies that he has never denied that the humanity in Socrates and the humanity in Plato are numerically different (*numero diuersas*); indeed, it is true to say that the one is not the other. The difficulty is caused by the fact that we can say of a universal both that it is "one in number" when "one" is taken to mean "not many" and "not one in number" when one is taken to mean "*incommunicabile*," for a universal is not "*incommunicabile*," indeed it is its opposite; a universal is "*communicabile*," that is common to many things. This is indeed the distinction Agricola had made in his treatise on universals, to which he explicitly harks back: the humanity of Socrates and the humanity of Plato are different (in the sense that the one is not the other), and each of them is singular and one, and yet—and this is crucial—they are not singulars by a "singularity of incommunicability" in the way he had explained these terms in his "treatise recently given to you by me."⁴²

Phaselus continues with a curious argument, quoted by Agricola. Starting with Agricola's own premise that Socrates's humanity is "essentially similar" (*essentialiter simile*) to Plato's humanity (by Phaselus called "a" and "b"), he

⁴⁰) Aristotle, *Categories* 11b24–b33.

⁴¹) Phaselus to Agricola, f. 203r: "Cum dicitur ut sit uniuersale nihil aliud quam essentiale quedam in multis ut ita dicam similitudo, primum gratias habeo quod huius mee sententie tantam contra reales omnes et formales habeam propugnationem."

⁴²) Agricola to Phaselus, f. 206v; see appendix.

draws the conclusion that a and b must be utterly different (*prorsus diuersas*), because if one were the same as the other, they would not be similar to each other. Phaselus's point seems to be that similarity presupposes non-identity: we can only speak of similarity between two things when the two are not the same, which Phaselus leads to conclude—rather quickly, one would think—that they must be entirely different *per se* (*per se prorsus diuersa*). Agricola qualifies this argument first by pointing out that strictly speaking it is not humanity that is similar to humanity, but that Socrates is similar to Plato because of their humanity. For the sake of argument, however, Agricola is prepared to accept this way of talking (*hic modus loquendi*) and the conclusion that a cannot be b. But when Phaselus adds that all similar things belong to the category of relation (*ad aliquid*), which he uses as support for his conclusion that a and b are “*per se prorsus diuersa*,” Agricola thinks that this step is not valid, though he admits that he does not quite understand what Phaselus is saying. Agricola's paraphrase of Phaselus's curious argument may be set out as follows:

1. humanities a and b are similar (*similes*)
2. all similar things are relatives (*ad aliquid*)
3. relatives are all such things as are said to be just what they are, of other things, or in some other way in relation to something else (part of the Aristotelian definition)⁴³
4. but the two humanities (a and b) are relatives
5. hence they are just what they are, of other things (*earum hoc ipsum esse quod sunt aliorum est*)
6. hence, they are different from each other (*per se diuerse*).

Without denying that a and b—insofar as they are similar things—are different from each other, Agricola wants to keep open the possibility of saying that a and b—insofar as they are both humanities—are not different, so that Phaselus's argument on likenesses as relatives is to no avail. Agricola's reply is difficult to understand as well. He first distinguishes between a concrete and an abstract sense of the indeclinable expression “*ad aliquid*.” In its concrete sense it refers to the terms of the relation (the *relata*), in its abstract sense to the relation itself. When Phaselus says that “all similar things are relatives (*ad aliquid*),”

⁴³) Aristotle, *Categories* 11b24, transl. Boethius: “Ad aliquid uero talia dicuntur quaecumque hoc ipsum quod sunt aliorum dicuntur, uel quomodolibet aliter ad aliud...,” Aristoteles, *Categoriae vel Praedicamenta: translatio Boethii*..., ed. L. Minio-Paluello (Brugues, 1961), 18.

that is are related things (*relata*), Agricola has no problem with that, but when Phaselus adds that “relatives are those things of which one thing is said to be of something else,” this cannot be true for all relatives, for though, e.g., father and son are related, “they are independent items, and one is not of the other (*independens et quod non sit alterius*).” This does not mean that a and b are “utterly different,” because as humanities a and b do not differ, even though as likenesses they are relatives and hence differ. Agricola’s point is not well expressed but becomes clearer in what follows.

Phaselus claims that essences such as a and b are individual things, different from each other, which do not need any extrinsic feature “below (*deorsum*)” that individuates them nor “above (*superius*)” that makes them “univocal and unified” (*univocante et uniente*). What he may have in mind is that there is no individual property such as Platoness required to make the humanity of Plato a unique, independent thing, nor a higher unifying form such as Plato’s animality. The fact that Phaselus adds “*deorsum*” (below) means, so Agricola thinks, that he is using “individual” in the sense of something *incommunicabile*, that is something “of which a similar essence is not found in anything else.” For we call something common to many things not because it is one in number in these many things but because many things are similar to that thing (*conformabilia in eo*): these things are one by assimilation. Something is therefore called an individual not because it is one in number—because everything that *is* is one in number—but because it is “the opposite of universal or common.” We thus see Agricola repeating more or less the same distinction between two senses of individual: horse and man are similar or like each other insofar as they both have animality even though the animality in this particular man is different from that in this particular horse: they are different in number because “the one is not the other,” and they are different in species because there is something else that attains to both of them. But two things cannot be *difformia* and *conformia* in the same respect. Hence a and b (the animality of horse and of man) are *conformia* in that they are both animal, which means that in this very same respect of sharing animality they cannot be different as well; the difference must be sought elsewhere, which lies of course in their having a different species. “Horse differs from man because of its horseness and man differs from horse because of humanity.”

The point seems trivial but for Agricola it provides the answer to Phaselus, who, as we have seen, had claimed that animalities a and b differ and do not need anything extrinsic to make them individual. They differ (*diuerse*) indeed, that is, the one is not the other, but in order make them singular things it is necessary to add a specific difference. The two animalities would not be

dissimilar unless humanity is added to the one and horseness to the other. And also among two humanities: "Socrates differs from Plato not only because he is not Plato but also because he has a property by which Socrates, insofar as he is Socrates, is *difformis* from Plato (insofar as the latter is Plato). And this is the difference of which we have said it is individual." It is this addition that renders each of them something unique and "incommunicable."

Agricola's response to Phaselus does not add very much to what we have already learned from his first treatise, and all in all we cannot call it an important or philosophically deep discussion. But the fact that Agricola keeps firm to his position tells us something of the commitment he feels toward it: he tries to do justice to the individuality of things while at the same time believing that the common patterns we see are grounded in extra-mental reality. It is this conviction that informs his *De inventione dialectica* as well, to which we will turn now.

5. From *De universalibus* to *De inventione dialectica*

The heart of Agricola's theory of argumentation are the *loci*, and his treatment of them demonstrates his practical bent of mind. First and foremost he wants to teach his readers how to argue and how to speak convincingly about a subject, and how to lay bare the argumentative structure of a text, and so on. As noticed in §1, philosophical questions of how these patterns of argumentations might reflect or are grounded in reality do not belong to his program.⁴⁴ Yet the topics, as Agricola knows full well, include a number of items that play an important role in metaphysics and other parts of philosophy: "dialectics receive its terms from metaphysics, and it is metaphysics that shows dialectics what they are, but it is the task of dialectics to treat of things in an orderly way and to judge them" with the aid of topics.⁴⁵ It is not surprising therefore that Agricola's treatment of the topics shows—in line with tradition—a certain ontological slant: topics refer to internal or external, necessary or contingent aspects of a thing. Thus we have "internal" topics, which are "within the substance of a thing" (e.g. genus, species, property/difference, whole, part) or "bring a certain manner or disposition to it" (adjacents, actions, subject) and we have "external" topics, which refer to "necessarily joined aspects" (e.g. causes, effects, place, time) or "accidents which can exist with or without a thing"

⁴⁴) At various places Agricola writes that some of the more theoretical issues are out of place in his discussion, e.g. *DID*, 18 and 81.

⁴⁵) *DID*: "ratio rerum iudiciumque," 210.

(e.g. contingents, similars/dissimilars) and those that are joined to the thing “without necessity” (e.g. opposites). The further subdivisions need not detain us here, but it is evident that topics refer to aspects of a thing or describe aspects “around” it.⁴⁶ Elsewhere Agricola speaks of *loci* as showing us the way or as penetrating into the “nature of things,” or even into “the intimate and hidden nature of things.” And they also offer us ways of dividing things, e.g. the differentia rationality divides rational from non-rational beings.⁴⁷

The foundation of the topics in the things themselves does not automatically entail philosophical realism, and we find Agricola saying that genus and species are predicated of a thing, just as the topics are headings under which we are invited to view and discuss whatever thing.⁴⁸ Yet many of Agricola’s formulations show a fluid transition from speaking about the things themselves and the topics that are based on them; genus and species are more than concepts or general headings under which to review a thing or case; they seem real aspects of that thing. He also talks frequently about “the nature of things” or “the inner essence of a thing,” even though, as he admits, that often eludes us: the true nature of things often “remains hidden from us,” and hence arguments directly based on the substance or causes of things are often very hard to find.⁴⁹

But even though the nature of individual things might often elude us, we can observe the similarities and disagreements between things, and in fact this human capacity is central to Agricola’s account of argumentation: to argue that A is a B means showing what they have in common. Hence, dialectic is all about finding such agreements and disagreements between things, events or cases.⁵⁰ But these agreements are based on the things themselves. Our

⁴⁶ *DID*, 22–24; cf. also *DID*, 24: “mihi naturam ordinemque rerum sequenti” at the start of his discussion of the topics (which looks similar to the ending of *De univ.*, 41: “ad rerum naturam”).

⁴⁷ *DID*, 72, 93, 146. See also *DID*, 44 on differentia.

⁴⁸ *DID*, 34 and 35, and passim.

⁴⁹ *DID*, 171; cf. 44 for an apparently fluid transition from topics as saying something about real aspects of things to topics as signs. The limits of human understanding are stressed e.g. in *DID*, 2 (Academy), 26 (lack of true differentiae), 35 (idem), 43 (difficulty of finding true differentiae), 72, 163, 207 (Academy). Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 177–81 argues that Agricola was not a sceptic, at least not in the strict sense, “in that, although he believed that most things are not certain, for him the *probabile* included the certain,” *pace* L. Jardine, ‘Lorenzo Valla and the intellectual origins of humanist dialectic’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 15 (1977), 143–163.

⁵⁰ To define a thing we must know that thing and its *natura* or *habitus*, which means that we must know in what it agrees and disagrees with other things; *DID*, 27; see also Agricola, *Laus philosophiae*, ed. Alardus, II, 151.

categorizations are not a matter of human invention. Although the variety of things is immense, and man's power to know the inner essences of things limited, we have the capacity to observe and recognize the similarities between things, their common condition or nature. As Agricola explains:

all things which are said either for or against something fit together and are, so to speak, joined with it by a certain community of nature (*quadam naturae societate*). Now the number of things is immense and consequently the number of their properties (*proprietas*) and differences (*diversitas*) is also immense. This is the reason why no discourse and no power of the human mind can comprehend individually all the relations in which individuals agree and differ. However a certain common condition (*communis quaedam habitudo*) is present in all things (even though they are different in their appearances), and they all tend to a similarity of their nature (*naturae similitudinem*). So, for example, every thing has a certain substance of its own, certain causes from which it arises, certain effects it produces. And so the cleverest men have picked out (*excerpsere*), out of that vast variety of things, these common headings (*communia capita*) such as substance, cause, effect and the others...⁵¹

As “common headings” the topics refer to the common condition of things: each thing belongs to a genus, has a certain substance, is caused by something, has a certain effect, is at a certain place and so on. Some of the Aristotelian categories and the predicables are thus included in the list of topics, but the topics contain more than the traditional set of universals; they are rather universal aspects of things, and hence a good starting point for speaking about them.⁵²

We are now in a better position to see the common ground between his early work on universals and his *De inventione dialectica*. It goes probably too far to see in the early treatise the “Grundlage” for the *De inventione dialectica*;⁵³ Agricola's principal sources of the *De inventione dialectica*—Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian and Boethius—are more important than his own little treatise on universals. Yet his understanding of the topics clearly owes something to these earlier thoughts about universals. In both works Agricola emphasizes the common aspects of things that enables us to categorize and talk about things without

⁵¹ *DID*, 9; cf. Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 140. Agricola frequently says that things have their own nature, power and function, e.g. “nativa enim est quaedam omnibus adiacens vis” (64) and “omniaque propositum sibi destinatumque finem” (79). Things behave in a predictable and regular way because they have a particular ontological structure.

⁵² Agricola, at one point, equates the order of things with the order of the categories: “at illa [homo and virtus] toto rerum ordine, hoc est, praedicamentis, sunt diducta” (154). Substance is called the “receptacle and foundation of every thing” (76); magnitude plays the role of subject for the other accidental categories, called “adiacentia” in Agricola's system (76).

⁵³ See n. 6 above.

denying the fundamental unicity and individuality of things. But while in his early treatise he talked about universals as essential similitudes, in the *De inventione dialectica* they have become the *loci* of his dialectical system: the topics as labels of the general features that things share (or do not share). There is an ambiguity, however: A and B can have something in common, e.g. both are yellow, but this universal is not to be identified with the topic contingent that has led the mind to look for common accidents in A and B. Similarly, the genus animality in a horse is not identical with the topic genus that has led the mind to look for the type of genus in that horse.

This ambiguity can arise because Agricola describes the invention of topics in much the same way as the noticing of universals as common features of things. “Wise men” have noticed that all things consist of a substance, and hence have selected substance as a common heading, a *locus*, which can be used in argumentation. In much the same way we find horse and dog similar because we notice, using the topic of genus, that both are animals. In both cases Agricola uses a similar kind of terminology: the treatise states that we can find (*reperiri*) universals by noticing common characteristics of things, while the *De inventione dialectica* speaks of picking out (*excerpsere*) the common headings.⁵⁴ Perhaps Agricola presupposes a process of abstraction by which we come to know universals and the *loci*, but he does not spell out the mechanism let alone describe it in terms of sensible and intelligible species and phantasms. It seems as if man must develop a kind of intuition to *see* the differences and agreements between things, an intuition that can be learned and sharpened by practice (*usus*, 89; cf. 76), and prudence is defined in these very same terms, namely seeing what a thing is and how it differs and agrees with other things, to what it can lead and from what it comes (3). The topics aid us in noticing these common features: they direct the mind to notice certain aspects of reality, leading the way to clear thinking, reasoning and writing (3).⁵⁵ The mind investigates the multifarious phenomena registered by the senses, bringing forth (*elicere*), distinguishing and ordering “all the forms of things and their common conditions (*habitudines*) and kinds,” while also putting them into the several branches of the arts and sciences.⁵⁶ Given the immense richness of

⁵⁴ Cf. Friedrich, “‘War Rudolf Agricola Nominalist?’”, 379 and Kessler, ‘Die verborgene Gegenwart Ockhams’, 152 and 160 n. 51, without referring to what I see as an ambiguity in Agricola’s account.

⁵⁵ *DID*, 86: “certiore nanque cursu intentionem mentis diriget.”

⁵⁶ Agricola has an empirical bent of mind; he frequently advises observing things carefully, with sense perception and intellectual cognition working together (65). See *DID*, 75: “Quae mens nostra deinde accepta a sensibus cognoscit primum, deinde varie multipliciterque composita

the phenomena (*varie multipliciterque composita inter se atque divisa*) it is all the more important to have a system of topics, derived from a consideration of things, that functions as a kind of lens that enables us to notice and explore common patterns and structures.

This talk of common patterns and structures may seem a bit loose, but as we have seen Agricola himself includes a number of “general and common” precepts, commands and laws under the umbrella of universal: each discipline works with common notions. In the *De inventione dialectica* the wide applicability of topics in all kinds of disciplines is stressed as well: topics are not only relevant for oratory but also for law, medicine, philosophy and science (93).

When we come to Agricola’s discussion of the relevant topics of similarity, opposites and differentia, we do not find him repeating verbatim the same distinctions and terminology from the earlier treatise. “Similar” are illustrated by what we could now call an analogy (133), though at another place *similia* are said—more in line with the treatise on universals—to be things that have a quality in common (103). In his discussion of the topics of opposites and differentia, Agricola does not repeat his earlier distinction between singular in number (= one as opposed to many) and singular “in *causabilitate uel incommunicabilitate*” in exactly these terms but distinguishes between opposites (one opposed to one, e.g. cold to warm) and differentia (one opposed to many, e.g. a species as “opposed” to the other species falling under the same genus, 161), referring also to Aristotle’s distinction of four types of opposites (155, *Categories* 11b24-b33; for a threefold way of dividing a unity; see 45). Nor does he use his earlier distinction on *diversa*, *differentia*, and *discreta* in the chapter on the topic of differentia.⁵⁷ A brief discussion of differences at the level of individuals, species, genus and category leads to a recognition of the ambiguo-

inter se atque divisa, formas omnes rerum habitudinesque et genera ordinemque cunctorum elicit, discernit, disponit inque varios artium scientiarumque distribuit usus.” Cf. passage quoted above (*DID*, 9), and also 209: “Primum constat artes omnes paulatim et per incrementa repertas esse, neque quisquam idem artem aliquam coepit et absolvit. Prima autem initia a sensuum observatione profecta sunt, ut cum viderent homines aliquid iterum tertiove et saepius iterum fieri, experimento sumpto, ausi sunt tandem affirmare, prorsus sic se rem in omnibus habere,” followed by examples from observations of nature. Cf. also 63: “Intellectu vero comprehenduntur, quaecumque ex istis [the phenomena] animus, agitatione mentis, colligit atque decrepit.” Note the use of *excerpere* or, in this case, *decerpere*.

⁵⁷ *DID*, 161: “Differunt autem omnia aut solum ut singula: ut singuli inter se homines, singuli equi et quaecumque individua sub una continentur specie. Aut specie: ut quaecumque individua sub diversis sunt speciebus, vel ipsae inter se species diversae: ut hic homo et hic equus, et homo et equus.”

ity of the expression “one in number,” which can refer to substance (e.g. *homo* and *animal rationale* having the same substance) or to “*denominatio*” (as in “Cicero is eloquent,” even though Cicero and eloquence are not the same in substance) (162). There is no mention here nor anywhere else of the Scotist notion of individual difference, and we look in vain for the term “*(in)communicabilitas*” that played an important role in the earlier treatises.⁵⁸

6. Conclusion

It is risky to compare such a long and rich work as the *De inventione dialectica* with a brief treatise on a limited topic that does not even begin to address the many issues that form the contents of the *De inventione dialectica*. Yet it is clear that Agricola’s view of the topics owes something to his earlier reflection on universals. We have seen him defending a position in the treatise on universals that tries to combine his belief in common essences and qualities that structure reality with his conviction that everything that *is* is one, including common natures that are singular in unity though not singular in “incommunicability.” Universals exist outside the soul, but it is our mind that must notice the similitudes between different things and bring them together under species and genera, and, more generally, under general patterns that constitute the content of the sciences. We have also suggested that this moderate realism is not too dissimilar from Scotus’s position that modern scholars have described as a conceptualism of universals coupled with a realism of community, though Agricola’s debt might have been fairly general. His treatment of the topics in the *De inventione dialectica* may be said to follow on his treatment of universals: topics too describe real aspects of things, but they function at a higher level, being labels of general features that things have in common. Topics are said to have been invented by wise men, yet their invention is not a mere stroke of brilliant intuition but is based on observation of a mind-independent structure of reality. The function of topics in Agricola’s system is of course argumentative and rhetorical, but their roots are metaphysical, as Agricola himself explicitly acknowledged.

⁵⁸) Agricola often speaks of the “nature and property (*proprietas*) of a thing” (e.g. 72, 109, 175, 209, 363), which is arguably the equivalent of the common nature and the *differentia individualis* of the earlier treatise. His use of the term “*proprium*” follows the Porphyrian account (49–50), and hence it is a different concept.

As such, the little treatise—and Agricola's response to Phaselus—may thus be seen as an early step in Agricola's long-term project to revise and re-organize the systems of topics as he encountered them in Aristotle, Cicero and Boethius. Certainly, these sources are his main sources of inspiration, but the debate on universals, embedded in the discussions on universals in the universities that he attended, might have helped him in recognizing the metaphysical foundation of the topics, something that the classical sources would also have suggested to him. It may well go too far to say that the universals were transformed into the topics. Rather, the universals became part of the topics—as they had already been in the systems of the topics of his predecessors—just as other general features of things were upgraded to become a common label to be used by the speaker searching for material to construct convincing arguments.

Unlike humanists such as Valla, Ramus and Nizolio, Agricola was thus not against metaphysics nor was he an anti-Aristotelian as they professed to be (though he frequently criticized the style of Aristotle and his scholastic successors). He did not feel the need to attack the foundations of the Aristotelian-scholastic edifice, convinced as he was that things had essences in common. He moved in circles where Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus were venerated as patrons of the late-medieval schools and *Bursae*, and, as pointed out, he himself praised Duns Scotus a few times. But in spite of his recognition of the importance of metaphysics, there is a tendency in his thinking that moves away from a focus on universals as such and away from the process of abstraction by which universals as essences are to be dug up. As we have seen, the traditional universals become a subclass of a much wider group of common headings to be used flexibly for inventing arguments in the widely expanded art of dialectic. These headings direct our view to what things have in common and in what they disagree, and at several places in the *De inventione dialectica* and also in his famous letter to Jacques Barbireau containing an extensive plan of study for the addressee, we see Agricola championing empirical observation of all aspects of things, which enables us to bring the phenomena under groups, general laws, general rules and precepts, which make up the arts and sciences.⁵⁹ From here it is a small step to identifying the

⁵⁹) DID 62-65; 70-71; 75-76, 209; letter no. 38, ed. and transl. Van der Laan and Akkerman, 207: "I would recommend you attack the things themselves (*res ipsas*). You have gotten to the stage of needing to examine the geography and nature of lands, seas, mountains and rivers; the customs, borders and circumstances of nations that live on earth; the empires in their historical

universals—used in a suitably broad and flexible way, as we have seen Agricola employing the term—with the kinds or groups in which we categorize things: the universal cat-hood becomes the class of individual cats out there: the focus is on the group of things that show particular similarities (and dissimilarities) rather than on the entity—mysteriously one and many at the same time—that lies hidden in the individual things and that somehow needs to be disclosed by analysis and abstraction. It is a step that Nizolio, who often refers to Agricola, explicitly takes in his critique of universals (1553), identifying universals with groups of individuals that the human mind grasps as one.⁶⁰ The pragmatic turn that Agricola makes in the field of dialectic is thus accompanied by an understanding of universals that has become less overtly metaphysical. Agricola's achievements were of course in the field of dialectic, but his pragmatic and empirical approach, championing detailed observation and a careful description of the phenomena, might be interpreted as an indication of a gradual change in the intellectual climate that ultimately led to new forms of learning and new approaches in studying the natural world.⁶¹

or extended forms; you have now got to look into the medicinal properties of trees and herbs...” (with two minimal changes to their translation). See n. 56 above.

⁶⁰ See Nauta, ‘Anti-Essentialism and the Rhetoricization of Knowledge’.

⁶¹ I am grateful to Henk Braakhuis and in particular to Peter Mack for their suggestions and comments. Nikki Hausen was so kind to check my English.

Appendix: An Edition of Agricola's Reply to a Critic of his Treatise on Universals (Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod. poet. et phil. 4° 36)

As explained in the article, Agricola's treatise on universals, which Alardus of Amsterdam incorporated in his sixteenth-century edition of the *De inventione dialectica* (Cologne, 1539), was criticized in a brief text by a certain Phaselus, whom Agricola seems to have known personally (see the text below lines 46 and 80). Nothing is known about this Phaselus. Agricola responded to him with the little text transcribed and lightly edited below, entitled in the MS "Rhodolph Agricola Phaselo philosopho de universali singulari et uno." Phaselus's own text is written in a style that is hardly comprehensible, so I decided not to give my transcript here, although the handwriting is clear. Phaselus's text and Agricola's response (but not Agricola's original treatise) are found in the famous collection of Agricola's texts in the Stuttgart manuscript (Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod. poet. et phil. 4° 36):

- 203r-204v (new pagination): *Sententia Phaseli philosophi de universali singulari et uno ad Rhodolphum scripta*
- 205r-209r (new pagination): *Rhodolph Agricola Phaselo philosopho de universali singulari et uno.*

The entire manuscript was compiled at the initiative of Agricola's friends and admirers, the brothers Dietrich and Johannes von Plieningen, who asked their copist Johannes Pfeutzer to transcribe the *De inventione dialectica* and other texts, probably in the early 1490s. We do not know which exemplars he used. An extensive description of the entire manuscript is provided in the catalogue of the Stuttgart MSS.¹

Rhodolph Agricola Phaselo philosopho de universali singulari et uno²

Quum lego ea que doctissime uir mihi respondisti non modo modernorum (ut hoc uerbo utar) acumen quod sibi precipue uenditare uolunt requiro sed tuum iudicium miror, quod haud cunctanter omnibus huius recentioris

¹ W. Irtenkauf and I. Krekler, *Codices poetici et philologici* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1981), 102-104 with reference to older literature on p. 102. [http://www.manuscripta-mediaevalia.de/hs/katalogseiten/HSK0076_b102.jpg.htm]. See also L. Mundt's edition of the *DID* (Tübingen, 1992), 659-62.

² Rh<od>o<lph> Agri<cola> phaselo ph<ilosoph>o de universali singulari et uno *ms.* Old pagination 191r-195r; new pagination 205r-209r.

5 philosophie pretulero. Quum enim tam diligenter distinxissem quid unum,
 quid singulare, quottuplex rerum distinctio esset, quid item uniuersalitas esset,
 quid communicabilitas in rebus, tu tamen tanquam oblitus aduersarii uisus es
 mihi non tam de his que ego dixi quam que dici solent a uulgaribus et, ut ait
 Cicero, quintae classis philosophis maluisse disserere.³ Vt tamen conferamus
 10 pedem et intra prescriptum et uelut praefinitos terminos agamus, ante omnia
 statuendum uidetur quid sit communicabilitas in rebus; ex ea⁴ enim oritur
 universale. Nihil enim aliud uidetur esse uniuersale quam unum communica-
 bile multis. Commune ergo dicitur uel possessione uel efficiendi ratione. Sic
 res que publice sunt communes dicuntur omnium ciuium, et filii communes
 15 parentum sicut apud Virgilium dictum est: “et nati serues communis
 amorem.”⁵ Quandoque commune dicitur quod multis inest, sic pestilentiam
 commune malum dicimus et dicimur communicare eruditionem nostram
 cum his quos docemus. Priori autem modo potest unum numero manens
 commune esse, nam possunt unius rei multi esse domini, et pater atque mater
 20 communiter unum gignunt. Quod autem in existendo commune dicitur, id
 impossibile est unum numero manens communicari cum multis; neque enim
 possibile est ut unum manens insit multis. Dicimus /205v / itaque pestilen-
 tiam commune malum esse, non quod multi eadem pestilentia numero
 laborent, suo enim quisque egrotat morbo, sed quod sit similis generis pesti-
 25 lentia in multis. Sic et doctrina communicatur, non quod quisquam eam
 ipsam quam habet alii tradat, sed quod docendo similis rationis in alio erudi-
 tionem quis parat. At faciem suam nemo alteri communicare dicitur, quo-
 niam non est in manu cuiquam ut eius similitudinem alteri tradat. Quum sit
 ergo uniuersale commune multis in existendo uel inherendo—quod enim de
 30 multis dicitur necesse est insit et multis—erit uniuersale commune hac poste-
 riori ratione communitatis, ut sit nihil aliud uniuersale quam unum cuius
 similitudo reperiatur⁶ in multis. Unum autem dico non numero quemadmo-
 dum unaqueque res una dicitur sic ut non sit multa sed unum, quemadmo-
 dum in duobus albis dicimus unum esse colorem⁷ hoc <est> unitate
 35 indifferentie uel similitudine rationis uel (ut propriissime uno uerbo eloquar)
 conformitate. Conformes enim res esse idipsum est quod dicimus uel conue-
 nire specie uel unam speciem habere, καὶ γὰρ τὸ εἶδος, quod nos speciem

³) *Acad. post.* 2.73.

⁴) *eo ms.*

⁵) *Aen.* 2.789 (*serua*).

⁶) *corrected from reperitur by the scribe*

⁷) *colore ms?*

uocamus,⁸ Cicero maluit formam interpretari.⁹ Itaque que specie conuenire dicimus, non absurde conformia diceremus. Quemadmodum ergo similitudinem in multis unam qualitatem dicimus non numero unam sed ratione aut
 40 conformitate, et equalitatem in multis unam quantitatem simili unius interpretatione, sic uniuersalitatem aut identatem genericam aut specificam dicimus in multis unam essentiam, unum genus, unam speciem, ad hanc /206r/ eandem unius rationem quam prediximus. Non esse autem istud meum
 45 τέχνασμα nec hec dicere me, quo urgentes nouioris philosophie argumentationes lubrico (ut soles iocari) flexu elabar. Sed sic omnes ueteres et sensisse et locutos esse, paratius est deprehendere quam ut docendum putem. Nec enim Porphyrius dixit pure plures homines esse unum hominem sed unum hominem specie. Quod si sensisset in multis hominibus communem quandam
 50 humanitatem numero unam esse, quominus poterant unum numero uocari ab uno numero inexistente eis quam ab albedine alba, a quantitate magna uocantur? Sic Aristoteles quum dixit uniuoca esse quorum nomen est unum et secundum id nomen ratio est eadem, ut bos equus homo idem nomen habent animalis, et eandem proinde rationem. Quod si interrogasses Aristotelem
 55 “essetne ratio animalis specie eadem in homine equo et boue?” dixisset: “nequaquam, sed genere tantum.” Ergo aliud animal specie bos est aliud equus aliud homo. Iam quum in philosophia in primis confessum sit impossibile esse que specie differunt numero eadem esse, certum est idem numero commune animal noluisse Aristotelem dicere esse in homine equo boue, quum
 60 specie esset in eis animal diuersum. Sane esse naturam animalis in omnibus animalibus hac ratione communem qua a me explicatum est neque ipse negas neque quisquam, arbitror, cui ulla ratio est aut notitia rerum, inficias ibit. Sed hanc animalis naturam ab equi natura in equo et equi naturam a Rhebi
 <natura>¹⁰ in Rhebo distingui, id prorsus uidetur, in quo nobis non conuenit,
 65 hoc est: ego aliud esse a quo Rhebus animal a quo equus a quo Rhebus uocetur dico, id tu negas; hoc est in quo constituimus /206v/ hec summa certaminis nostri est. Dicamus ergo ad ea que obiicis dicemusque his ipsis <uerbis> quibus usus es ne quam fraudem aut captionem struere uideamur. “Si homo homini essentialiter similis est,” inquis, “inter essentialiter similia cadit relatiua
 70 oppositio quia similitudo. Similitudo unius tantum aut in uno tantum esse non potest nisi duo sint alba dueque albedines albedine similia non sunt. Hac igitur uniuersalis definitione ad hoc ut humanitas actu uniuersalis sit de

⁸) Aristotle, *Cat.* 2b18.

⁹) *Acad. post.* 1.8.

¹⁰) natura added by me.

75 minori due erunt humanitates, etiam si posteriorum nihil sit siue indiuidualis
 differentia uocetur siue suppositum.”¹¹ Hec tu quasi uero. Ego istud usquam
 uel negauerim uel negem et non aperte plus semel dixerim etiam duas huma-
 nitates in Socrate et Platone numero diuersas esse sic ut uerum sit dicere hanc
 non esse illam. Et ego ipse etiam dixi utranque singularem singularitate numeri
 sic ut utraque una sit et non plures, sed non tamen iccirco singulares esse
 80 singularitate incommunicabilitatis quo modo¹² singularis (ut mihi uidetur)
 satis exacte persecutus in eo tractatu sum¹³ quem nuper ad te dedi.¹⁴ Proseque-
 ris ergo: “Signentur ille due humanitates suis notis et uocetur una quidem a
 reliqua b, et sit illa signatura in essentiali illa precisione et limitatione quo non
 fluctuet locutio, ‘a est’, ‘b est’.”¹⁵ Hoc possumus tibi nullo damno nostro dare.
 Addis deinde: “a est essentialiter simile ipsi b.”¹⁶ Hoc primum non dabo tibi,
 85 non enim humanitas est similis humanitati, quemadmodum albedines similes
 non sunt sed ea sunt quibus duo alba simulant; et anima animata non est sed
 est ea qua homo ani- /207r/ matus est. Sic humanitates due similes aut confor-
 mes non sunt sed sunt quibus duo homines similes sunt uel conformantur. Vt
 tamen demus istud orationis gratia similes esse duas humanitates, erunt haud
 90 dubie seipsis similes, sed hic est modus loquendi magis ad nostre mentis uim
 quam ad ueritatem rei consistens. Sed demus, inquam, istud quid inferis: “ergo
 a non est b, quia si a esset b, nequaquam a esset simile b.”¹⁷ Fateor sane hoc
 ipsum. Addis sed “similia omnia ad aliquid sunt quorum hoc ipsum [est]”¹⁸
 quod sunt aliorum est,¹⁹ per se igitur diuersa sunt a et b, per se prorsus diuersa,”
 95 haud sane uideo quo pacto hanc conclusionem ex hac propositione inferas.
 Neque enim uerba satis aperte id efficiunt. Videor tamen coniectura me colli-
 gere posse animum tuum. Sumis enim duas humanitates esse similes, deinde

¹¹ This and the following quotations cited by Agricola from Phaselus’ *sententia* can be found at f. 203r, henceforth referred to as “Phaselus;” Phaselus has “distinctione” rather than “definitione.”

¹² modos *ms.*

¹³ sum *added in superscr.*

¹⁴ A reference to Agricola’s *Questio de uniuersalibus*, a text that Alardus added in his 1539 ed. of the *DID* (see the article). Phaselus writes: “Primum gratias habeo quod huius mee sententie tantam contra reales omnes et formales habeam propugnationem” (203r). Alardus does not mention Phaselus in his introduction to the *Questio*. The order of composition was therefore: Agricola’s *Questio*, Phaselus’s *sententia*, and this response by Agricola.

¹⁵ Phaselus, f. 203r.

¹⁶ Phaselus, f. 203r.

¹⁷ Phaselus, f. 203r.

¹⁸ est *ms.*

¹⁹ sunt *Phaselus*, f. 203r. Aristotle, *Cat.* 6a36, transl. Boethius: “Ad aliquid uero talia dicuntur quaecumque hoc ipsum quod sunt aliorum dicuntur, uel quomodolibet aliter ad aliud...”

omnia similia esse ad aliquid. Deinde est definitio ad aliquid: quecumque ad aliquid sunt eorum hoc ipsum esse aliorum est; sed humanitates due sunt ad aliquid. Ergo earum hoc ipsum esse quod sunt aliorum est. Rursus due humanitates hoc ipso esse quod aliorum sunt, ergo hoc ipso esse diuerse sunt, ergo et per se diuerse sunt. Aut hoc est quod uis efficere aut licet ingenue fateri mihi non intelligere me quid dicas. Dicam primum ad ordinem colligendi, deinde de re ipsa. Primum ergo quod dicis “omnia similia esse ad aliquid,” quia hec uox ‘ad aliquid’ non habet declinationem, non est facile perspicere sitne concretum an abstractum. Fingamus ergo, aut rectius dicam sumamus nomina non inusitata his rebus, dicamusque concretum του πρόσ τι relatum, abstractum uero relationem. Quan- /207v/ do ergo dicis “omnia similia sunt ad aliquid,” i.e. sunt relata, nihil repugno. Quum addis “ad aliquid sunt quorum hoc ipsum quod sunt aliorum est,” certum est hic non definiri ad aliquid in concreto sed in abstracto. Duo enim homines ad aliquid, i.e. relati sunt, qui sunt pater et filius, non tamen hoc ipsum esse quod sunt aliorum est, cuique enim suum est esse per se et independens, et quod non sit alterius. Sin dicas autem duas humanitates quatenus similes sunt ad aliquid esse et eatenus hoc ipsum esse quod sunt aliorum esse, non negabo quatenus similes sunt, idest similitudines ipsas per se diuersas esse sed non quatenus humanitates sunt, neque enim arbitror dicere te ab eodem habere eas quod absolute humanitates et quod relatiue similes dicantur. Vides ergo quorsum tibi hec argumentatio redeat. Hec de ordine colligendi argumentationis tue; reliquum de re ipsa agam liberalius tecum quam credis, uincamque spem tuam, dabo per se diuersas esse has duas humanitates a et b per se, inquam, diuersas. Ecquid gratias agis? Ecquid hanc confessionem amplecteris? An dicis forte: “Quicquid id est, timeo Danaos hec dona ferentes.”²⁰ Recte ne an secus, istuddem alterius forte campi sudor esset uerum in presentia quando id cedere hosti forte saluis presidiiis mihi uideor posse non ero magnopere in hoc sollicitus.²¹ Infero ergo: “Per seipsa realiter indiuidua sunt a et b, quia signata diuersa.” Non nego esse per se indiuidua si capiamus indiuiduum pro omni eo quod unum numero est. “Nullo ergo,” inquis, “extrinseco²² indigent indiuiduante deorsum²³ nullo superius uniuocante aut uniente.” Duo colligis, quorum /208r/ alterum ex propositis sequi uidetur, alterum ex priori uelut pari infertur. De utroque dicendum est igitur, quoniam ex equo ad institutum nostrum pertinet utrun-

²⁰) *Aen.* 2.49.

²¹) *The sentence* Recte ne...sollicitus *might be corrupt.*

²²) extrinseco *ms.*; extrinseco *Phaselus*, f. 203r.

²³) deorsum *om.* *Phaselus*, f. 203r.

que. Quod dicis ergo non indigere a et b ulla extrinsecus indiuiduante deorsum, quoniam addis id²⁴ uerbum “deorsum,” haud dubie de eo indiuiduo loqui uideris quod incommunicabile est, idest cuius propria ratio in nullo alio
 135 similis reperitur, quoniam sursum et deorsum solum latitudine conformitatis et angustia difformitatis in rebus in proposito nostro constant. Neque enim aliquid dicitur com<m>une multis quia sit unum numero in multis sed quia multa sunt conformabilia in eo, uel quia id est in multis non unum numero sed tantum conforme, hoc est unum assimulatione, sic contra quod indiuiduum est uel singulare non dicitur quia ab alio diuersum est, i.e. quia hoc non
 140 est illud aut quia unum numero est—quecunque enim sunt, sunt unum numero quodque—sed quum sit oppositum uniuersali uel communi, que ex conformabilitate naturam suam sortiuntur. Dicitur econtrario singulare uel indiuiduum quod quantum ad precisam rationem suam nulli conforme est,
 145 hoc est quod differre diximus in priori tractatu uocari, quum inter differentia diuersa discreta diceremus quid interesset. Sic equus et homo quatenus est in utroque animalitas conformia sunt, sunt enim eatenus similia, quia utrunque horum conformem uel similem habet animalitatem, quanquam sit utraque animalitas in hoc homine et hoc equo per se diuersa altera ab altera, hoc est
 150 numero /208v/ non solum sed et specie distincta: uerum numero per se distinguuntur quia hec non est illa,²⁵ specie uero distinguuntur per aliud aliquid accedens ad ea. Homo enim et equus quatenus utrunque animal est, hoc est in animalitate, rogo ergo: sintne diffformes homo et equus quatenus utrunque animal est, hoc est in animalitate, non uidetur ut possint duo esse in eodem
 155 precisa²⁶ diffformia et conformia. Sunt autem diffformia homo et equus quoniam specie differunt, non autem animalitate ut dictum est. Ergo equinitate equus homini diffformis est et humanitate homo diffformis est equo. Quum sit autem datum hominem equumque hac quidem conformes esse diffformes et impossibile sit in eodem precise aliqua conformia et diffformia esse, quunque
 160 sint conformes homo et equus animalitate, diffformes equinitate ex parte equi, humanitate ex parte hominis, impossibile est idem precise esse animalitatem et equinitatem in equo et animalitatem et humanitatem in homine. Vides ergo ut non consequatur “sunt per se diuersa, ergo nullo indigent extrinseco²⁷ indiuiduante deorsum,” si de indiuiduitate (*sic*) uera que opposita est communicabilitati loquimur. Quemadmodum enim si dari possent animalitas equi et

²⁴) id *add. in superscr. ms.*

²⁵) ab illa *ms.*

²⁶) *ms.*; read *perhaps* precise? (cf. line 159 and 161, but see also line 144 above).

²⁷) extrinsecus *ms.*

hominis utraque per se subsistens, non adiuncta equinitate aut humanitate aut illa posteriore differentia, uerum esset dicere eas esse diuersas, hoc est hanc non esse illam, et esse hec duo animalia, sed ut singulares fierent he animalitates idest difformes uel differentes, necesse esset accedere differentias specificas
170 que singulares eas facerent; /209r/ est enim species generi comparata singulare quoddam. Ergo non erunt dissimiles he animalitates nisi accedat hinc humanitas illinc equinitas; neque dicentur differre inter se quanquam diuerse sint. Sic itidem in duabus humanitatibus fit ut utraque sit altera ab altera diuersa,
175 uerum Socrates a Platone non solum differt quia Socrates non Plato sed etiam accedit proprietas quedam qua Socrates quatenus Socrates est difformis est Platoni quatenus Plato est. Et hec est differentia illa quam indiuidualem dicimus uocari. Non ergo quanquam diuerse sint singulares dicentur he humanitates nisi accesserit eis differentia qua adiuncta tale quiddam constituent quod
179 sit incommunicabile, idest cui conforme in nullo alio possit inueniri.